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ABSTRACT

Noting that ethnographic records point to gender as an important theme in young children's daily lives, this study examined how Taiwanese children experienced the issue of gender in their play and outside of play in their preschool life. Research methods for this ethnographic study incorporated extensive video recording of naturally occurring daily preschool activities over three successive Spring semesters. Participating were 16 children attending a private preschool serving a working-class community in rural Taiwan. Findings were examined separately for official play time, nonofficial play time, and classroom time. Findings indicated that during official play time, some boys occasionally policed themselves from playing with girls, yet at other times engaged in play with girls. During pretend play sequences in the official play time, children pretended to be boyfriends and girlfriends and acted out situations of teasing. Gender boundaries to interaction were less obvious during non-official play times than during official play times. During classroom time, boys and girls interacted frequently with one another and did not seem concerned about gender segregation most of the time. Cross-gender friendships were common, but cross-gender friends did not make their friendship salient during official play time or during classroom group activities when choices were known to other children. Cross-gender friendships were under pressure of being accused of being romantic relationships, especially during the L year (equivalent to kindergarten in the U.S.) and more often among boys than among girls. Children talked about their current and future male-female relationships in their daily life, with talk becoming more serious in the L year and including topics such as dating and marriage. Children displayed a complex understanding about male-female relationships in different kinds of play time and inside and outside of play, with their interaction patterns linked to two cultural membership categories: a group member and a gendered person. (Contains 14 references.) (KB)

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MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIP INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF PLAY IN A WORKING-CLASS TAIWANESE PRESCHOOL

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Children constantly face the issue of gender in becoming a participating member of their culture and society. A body of literature has focused a great deal on identifying variations among children and how children segregate by gender (e.g., Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987; Ruble & Martin, 1998). Gender stereotyping and how it is related to children's interaction, personality traits, achievement areas and play styles are among the most often investigated topics. Some researchers have claimed that boys and girls have different focal concerns and different cultures (e.g., Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992; Gilligan, 1982).

Ethnographic records on children also points to gender as an important theme in children's daily life. Haight and Miller (1993) suggested that boys and girls preferred different replica objects in their pretend play in which boys used more action figures and vehicles whereas girls pretended with dolls. They found that the family supported this gendered tendency of giving different kinds of Christmas gifts to boys and girls. In one example, they illustrated that a boy incorporated dolls into his pretend play. Corsaro (1985, 1997) indicated that gender is an important membership category in peer culture in the preschool. He found an age trend of more gender segregation and different activity preference among 5-to-6-year olds than 3-to-5-year olds in the preschools both in the United States and Italy. However, this trend was more salient for American upper-middle-class children than for African-American or Italian children, which may be related to the classroom composition and curriculum orientation. Thorne (1993) provided extensive description and discussion about the increasing tendency of gender segregation and the complicated pattern of interaction between boys and girls in two working-class schools.

The issue of gender is also apparent in the studies focusing on pre-industrialized cultures. Kpelle boys and girls were assigned to different tasks when they were older (Lancy, 1998). Children's available playmates became selected. Huli boys and girls seemed to often play together but Huli boys did not take on female roles in pretend play (Goldman, 1998).

The goal of this study was to investigate relationship between boys and girls among children in a working-class Taiwanese preschool. Through close observation of children's daily activities in a wide range of social contexts, this study contributes to the "two cultures view" debate by providing both positive and negative cases as well as how gender as an important membership category in peer culture influences children's everyday life. In addition, this study contributes to the recent trend toward expanding the cultural record with respect to how children constantly encounter and negotiate the issue of gender in their peer group.

Method

This study was ethnographic in approach, including three phases of fieldwork across a three-year period, combining extensive video recording of naturally occurring

daily activities in the preschool. Each phase consisted of a period of 6 to 8 weeks of full-time participant observation during successive spring semesters of the preschool in 1996, 1997, and 1998. Like Corsaro (1985), the researcher was able to establish a special role in the preschool to access the children's peer groups that were not otherwise accessible to adults. Please see Liang (2000) for details.

The research site was a private preschool serving a working-class community in rural Taiwan. It's pseudonym is JingJing Preschool. Most of the parents of the preschool children were high-school graduates from working-class backgrounds. Factory workers, truck drivers, and secretaries were typical occupations. A small number of the parents were office clerks, postmen, policemen, school teachers, bank clerks and owners of small factories or shops. Most families speak both Taiwanese and Mandarin Chinese. Taiwanese is the daily language among most adults, yet code switching between Taiwanese and Mandarin Chinese is frequent. Most people identify Taiwanese as their mother tongue. Most children speak both Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese at home, depending on whom they speak with. Grandparents in general speak Taiwanese most of the time. Parents, who grew under an educational system in which Mandarin Chinese was the official language, speak both Taiwanese and Mandarin Chinese with their young children. The proportion with which they use these two languages varies across families. All of the focal children in this study were from two-parent households. All but one family owned their own homes.

The 16 focal children were classmates in their M year (equivalent to the final preschool year in the U.S.) and 12 of them moved together to their L year (equivalent to the kindergarten year in the U.S.). The children of this study attended one of the two "Montessori" classrooms in the preschool. The curriculum was a hybrid. As its name denoted, it had the flavor of Montessori's model. Montessori's and Froebel's instructional objects and techniques were used to teach subjects such as concepts of shapes and numbers. A rather traditional teaching method, including lecturing and working on workbooks, was implemented in the classroom. The classroom was very different from classrooms applying Montessori's model in the U.S. in which children's daily major task is self-initiated "operation" or manipulating objects.

Results

Although it was not the researcher's original intention to study gender during the fieldwork period, gender appeared to be an indispensable issue when describing the children's play and their daily life. The results of this paper report how Taiwanese boys and girls experience and handle the issue of gender in their play and outside of play in their preschool life. Because children played not only during official play time, which was granted by the teacher, but also in the little moments during their daily

routines. For convenience, play during official play time will be called official play. Play occurring during other than official play time is named as non-official play. When children simply engage in conversations without playful orientation or non-literal orientation, it will be addressed as non-play or outside of play.

Male/Female Relationship Inside of Play

Official Play Time

Because children in this study were rarely given official play time in the M year, the description regarding children's official play time followed is primarily based on their official play in the final year. During official play time, children would first set up a rug or several rugs with objects needed as their play area. Children would check with the teacher to make sure if there would be a block of official play time before they began a worksheet session or other assigned tasks. Thus they would use a few seconds to decide what to play and inform their playmates.

Most children played with same-gender peers. There were two major play groups. One was an all-boy group who played with blocks, and the other involved a majority of girls who engaged in household-related pretend play. 5 or 6 boys regularly played with a bucket of a special kind of blocks called Clipo (similar to Lego Blocks). During my observation period, there was no single instance in which a girl participated in playing with this special kind of blocks. 7 to 10 girls and occasionally 2 or 3 boys played household. This group was always dominated by girls yet was open to boys who wanted to join their pretending. For a sustained period of time, these two groups continued their previous play when a block of official play time was granted. Children who did not participate in these two major play groups often engaged in smaller group play or played alone with objects such as puzzles and blocks.

Don't play with females! But can I borrow your phone?: Boys' self-policing and participating in girls' play. During official play time, some boys occasionally self-policed themselves from playing with girls, yet they themselves at times engaged in play with girls. The following two examples demonstrate these two seemingly contradictory tendencies.

> Example 1:Thanks for letting me use your phone!
> 11:53:56
> In the middle of playing blocks, HongBin (boy) moves to an adjacent rug where BaoLing (girl) and WeiMing (boy) are playing. HongBin picks up a telephone at the rug.
> HongBin: WaLaLingLingLingLingLing (imitating the ringer of telephone), call

199 · 1-1-9, Hello! Police, LingLingLingLing! Hang up. Hey! (in Taiwanese) This is ... (in Taiwanese)
WeiMing (to BaoLing, not paying attention to HongBin): None? None, it's simple. (in Taiwanese)
HongBin: Hey, this is a real telephone! (in Taiwanese)
(ShiJun (boy) comes to the rug.)
ShiJun: Let me listen to the telephone! (in Taiwanese)
(11:54:30 WeiMing and BaoLing leave. WeiMing (B) leaves for the puzzle group. BaoLing (G) leaves to get something around this area.)
HongBin: Hey, this is a real telephone! It's real! (in Taiwanese)
ShiJun: Right! (in Taiwanese)
HongBin: Call (in Taiwanese) 119. What's your phone number? Your phone number? (in Taiwanese)
ShiJun: Look at it clearly! You look at this. (in Taiwanese)
(ShiJun is dialing the telephone.)
HongBin: Hey, what's your phone number? Hey, what's your phone number? (in Taiwanese)
ShiJun: You look by yourself. I demonstrate for you. (in Taiwanese)
(ShiJun is dialing the telephone.)
HongBin: Hey, what's your number?
ShiJun: Just now I dialed for you! (in Taiwanese)
HongBin: You "Hello" and I ... (in Taiwanese)
11:54:56
(BaoLing comes back to the rug and looks around.)
ShiJun: My home number is (in Taiwanese) 3699185
(ShiJun is dialing the phone.)
HongBin: I, my home number!! (in Taiwanese) You, me, my home number is (in Taiwanese) 3692—LingLingLingLingLing, 3-6-8-2-4-8-6!
(HongBin is dialing the phone.)
HongBin and ShiJun: LingLingLingLingLing, 3-6-9-9-1-8-5!
ShiJun: Oh, hang up!
(11:55:33 ShiJun stands up.)
HongBin (to BaoLing): *Thanks! (HongBin salutes BaoLing by putting his right hand near the front head) Thanks for letting me use your phone! Bye-Bye!*
(HongBin and ShiJun wave to BaoLing. BaoLing waves back.) Then, *[I'll] come again tomorrow! [I'll] come again tomorrow!*
ShiJun: Bye-Bye!
BaoLing: Bye-Bye!

HongBin: Thank you! Thank you!

(HongBin and ShiJun leave. BaoLing puts the phone back on the rug.)

(HongBin and ShiJun go to the Clipo bucket, standing and looking for seconds. They then move to the TV area. A minute later, they continue to fly their craft.)

In this example, in the middle of playing blocks, HongBin and ShiJun borrow BaoLing's telephone to play. After dialing a few numbers, including the police station and their home numbers, at the end of this pretending, the three children engage in a sequence of pretending to express thanks and say good-bye.

A few minutes later, in the following example, HongBin who engaged in play with BaoLing, a girl, policed himself and other boys from playing with girls.

Example 2: Don't play with females!

In the middle of playing blocks, HongBin produces some noises.

HongBin: WooWoo

ShiJun (to HongBin): Hue!Hue! (noise)

(HongBin suddenly got interested in the puzzle rug including ChiYin (girl) and YingChung (boy). The two children have been working on the puzzle together during this block of official play time. (Note that ChiYin is a very quiet girl, yet she is well liked by her classmates, including both boys and girls.) HongBin runs to get a spot and sit on the floor around ChiYin and YingChung's rug.)

HongBin: What are you doing? What are you doing? I want to play too!

(ShiJun and GuanKang (boy) turn around to look at the puzzle. LingJie (boy) arrives at the puzzle group.)

ShiJun: Ah! It's not this way. It should be arranged this way! (in Taiwanese)

GuanKang: This way ! This way! (in Taiwanese)

(Many hands are arranging the puzzle.)

(ShiJun stands up.)

ShiJun (to HongBin): I am going to take stuff for you! (in Taiwanese)

(ShiJun leaves.)

HongBin: Ok! (in Taiwanese)

(HongBin suddenly stands up.)

HongBin: *Ouch! Don't play with females!* (in Taiwanese)

(HongBin looks around.)

(ShiJun returns at 12:00:08. He looks at the puzzle group.)

ShiJun (to GuanKang): Ok! Ok! (ShiJun urges GuanKang to leave)

(GuanKang stays in the puzzle group.)

ShiJun: HongBin! Let's go! We get out first! We get out first! We get out first! (in Taiwanese)

(HongBin and ShiJun move away to fly their craft made by blocks.)
(GuanKang later joins them.)

In this example, HongBin polices himself and orders other boys not to play with females yet it does not seem effective. GuanKang, LingJie and YingChung continue playing with the girl ChiYin. Under ShiJun's urging, GuanKang finally leaves the puzzle group.

HongBin's self-policing is especially interesting in that he himself engaged in playing with a girl in Example 1. According to my observation, HongBin, as well as most boys in the classroom, never officially joined a mixed-gender play group at the very beginning of each official play time. Rather, they very often participated in other groups' play in the middle of their own play (e.g., Example 1 and 2). In other words, at the surface level, they did not belong to a mix-gender play group yet in reality they participated in mixed-gender play. Such phenomena, along with their self-policing from playing with girls, indicate their awareness of gender and innovative ways to participate in play with girls in a subtle way so that they could escape from the labeling and teasing inflicted by others and themselves. The issue of teasing will be addressed further in the next several examples.

Don't listen to my phone conversation! I am talking to my girlfriend: The pretend world. Unlike HongBin and ShiJun who never joined girls' play groups at the beginning of the official play time, YeeGee (boy) constantly participated in the major girls' play group and engaged in pretend play. Because the children might not finish a play scene during a given block of official play time, they often continued the scene during the next coming block of official play time.

The following example is part of an ongoing pretend play scene. The boy YeeGee, has played a role of LiangYun's boyfriend on an earlier day. In this play episode, YeeGee and LiangYun (the sister of NienTsu, who is the mother of the home) first call each other but the conversation is cut off by NienTsu. This drama is particularly interesting that the children acted quite complicated interactions between the boyfriend and the girlfriend's family members.

Example 3: Don't listen! I am talking to my girlfriend.
In the middle of pretend play, which started at around 10:53. It looks like LiangYun's (girl) family runs a restaurant. NienTsu (girl) is the mother. A stuff animal toy, a bunny, is the child of NienTsu. LiangYun is NienTsu's younger sister. YeeGee (boy) is a patron in the restaurant and later becomes LiangYun's boyfriend. BaoLing (girl) and YeeGee work in a bread store and LiangYun is one of their customers. Both YiWen's (girl) and MeiYing's (girl) roles are not

clear. It looks like they are LiangYun's family members, possibly LiangYun's sisters. Another group playing blocks is next to the restaurant. One of MeiYing's best friends HongBin, a boy, is in the blocks group. Rug A is the restaurant. Rug B is a bread store at one point but is later transformed into an unknown business. Rug C is a bread store. TJ substitutes for their teacher T, because T has a dental appointment.

11:17:04
(NienTsu comes to grab the bunny and walks toward MeiYing. MeiYing says something unintelligible. NienTsu walks away to the bookshelves. MeiYing walks to near the blocks group.)
11:17:16
(LiangYun picks up the phone.)
LiangYun: Hello!
YeeGee: xxxx 321
11:17:21
(NienTsu suddenly runs to grab the telephone from LiangYun and hangs up the phone.)
NienTsu: *Why are you talking on the phone?* (in a really harsh tone in Taiwanese)
LiangYun : *Well, that he, he calls me!* (in Taiwanese)
NienTsu: *Then you just don't listen to him* [=Then you just don't talk to him] ! (in Taiwanese)
(LiangYun looks at NienTsu, a bit helplessly.)
YeeGee (points to NienTsu): *That is really bad! It's she! You guys! [I] don't know what you are doing?* (in Taiwanese) (YeeGee smiles while saying this.)
MeiYing: For what? (in Taiwanese)
(NienTsu and MeiYing start pretending to beat, push, and kick YeeGee. YeeGee stands up and escapes. The three are smiling.)
(YiWen has touched some items at rug A.)
LiangYun: NienTsu !! (LiangYun is calling for NienTsu because NienTsu has the right to stop YiWen.)
11:17:45
(NienTsu returns to rug A. MeiYing goes to rug B.)
LiangYun: NienTsu! She made all this mess for you! (in Taiwanese) It's YiWen!
(NienTsu is arranging some items on the rug.)
LiangYun (to NienTsu): How about not making (in Taiwanese) bread! Bread is not fun (three words in Taiwanese). Come on! Go again to pick up all these!

(two phrases in Taiwanese)
(LiangYun, NienTsu, YiWen, and MeiYing are at rug A.)
11:08:07
(LiangYun packs all the bread and stand up. She tries to grab one item from MeiYing but MeiYing insists on carrying it by herself. The two girls carry some items to rug C.)
LiangYun (to BaoLing): This one. This one. (two phrases in Taiwanese) Take the bread to its place!
11:18:15
(LiangYun runs into YeeGee around rug C.)
LiangYun (to YeeGee): *I will call you later, OK?* (in Taiwanese)
(YeeGee nods.)
(LiangYun goes back to rug A.)
LiangYun (to NienTsu): NienTsu! *Can I make a phone call?* (in Taiwanese)
NienTsu! *Can I make a phone call?* (in Taiwanese)
(LiangYun uses a very polite tone.)
(NienTsu dials the number.)
NienTsu: *I dial the number and then you listen [=talk].* (in Taiwanese)
LiangYun: Good. (in Taiwanese)
(NienTsu hands over the phone to LiangYun.)
LiangYun: Hello!
YeeGee: For what?
MeiYing: *Ouch! Dirty!* Ok! Ok! (in Taiwanese)
(MeiYing, YeeGee and LiangYun all laugh. YeeGee is making a gesture pretending to hit MeiYing.)
YeeGee: *xxxx you want to run here to listen. [You] want to be hit by me?* (in Taiwanese)
(MeiYing runs away quickly to the back of LiangYun, still laughing.)
LiangYun: Hurry! (in Taiwanese)
YeeGee: That one, xxx (in Taiwanese)
LiangYun: Has xxxx ? (in Taiwanese)
11:18:57
TJ: Put away all the stuff!
(The conversation stops because of TJ's announcement. LiangYun immediately puts away the telephone and starts to clean up. Children are putting away the items quickly.)

In this example, YeeGee and LiangYun are teased by their playmates because

they telephone each other. In the middle of their first telephone conversation, they are cut off by NienTsu, the mother or the head of the household. It is interesting that NienTsu is pretending to be a mean person, which could be related to a household head's response to a phone call from an external man to a woman in the household. All children are smiling while they are performing this drama which in real life would be emotionally charged. Later LiangYun politely informs YeeGee that she will call him. This time, before she calls, she asks NienTsu very politely, "Can I make a phone call?" NienTsu agrees to dial the number for LiangYun. This seems to reflect children's understanding of how a household head could handle the right of using the telephone to call one's boyfriend. It is evident that without the household head's permission, one had better not use the telephone or would risk the conversation being cut off. This part of the pretend play is also interesting in that LiangYun performs a very important component of request: politeness. Without careful politeness and prior permission, one is not allowed to use the telephone to call her boyfriend.

When YeeGee complains about NienTsu's cutting off the telephone conversation, the two girls, NienTsu and MeiYing, start pretending to kick him, YeeGee runs away and all three are smiling. This is an interesting moment in that the boy is threatened by his girlfriend's family members. This approach-avoidance routine seems to reflect children's understanding about possible reactions from a girlfriend's family members to the boyfriend. The children's behavior displays that the girlfriend's family may be unfriendly and even offensive. The boyfriend may be hit and kicked and he better run away.

When YeeGee and LiangYun finally call each other again, they do not actually have enough knowledge to maintain a conversation that real boyfriend and girlfriend would say to each other. Instead, they say something really vague and just say "Hurrry!" because MeiYing is around and listening. YeeGee threatens MeiYing that he would hit her because of her teasing of "Ouch! Dirty!" and attempting to listen to the telephone conversation. Yet again both are smiling. The children's performance appears to display their understanding of the nature of easily getting teased when one is calling a girlfriend.

This segment of the pretend play demonstrates the children's understanding of boyfriend and girlfriend from several different persons' perspective: the boyfriend, the girlfriend, the household head, and the girlfriend's other family members. The nature of being easily teased of talking to one's girlfriend or boyfriend is enacted through the coordinated interaction of the four children. Despite the teasing, the two children who played the boyfriend and girlfriend did not drop their roles but maintained their roles until the end of this episode of pretend play. Apparently, they were well prepared to be teased and all the participants enjoyed the drama.

Non-official Play Time

At both year levels M and L, the issue of gender in children's non-official play revealed its importance. Boys and girls were more integrated in non-official play. Children constantly played with their friends and desk neighbors. Gender boundaries were less obvious in children's play during non-official play time compared to their official play time. In the following, I provide several examples to illustrate children's male/female relationship in their non-official play.

Example 4: Boy-girl mock fight (in the L year)
11:23:43
The teacher is not in the classroom. She probably is in the kitchen obtaining the children's lunches. HongBin (boy) arrives at the door with a pan of rice. MeiYing (girl) comes to the door. HongBin uses the rice pan to touch MeiYing. MeiYing runs after HongBin and pushes him on the back until HongBin reaches the designed spot for the rice pan. The two are smiling and laughing during this 1-minute mock fight. The two children then go to line up for the meal.

In Example 4, I provide a mock fight episode between a boy and a girl, who had been friends for more than a year. Similar play episodes involving chasing, mock fighting, and laughing were common among boys and girls. The size of the group ranged from two to more than 5 or 6 children.

The next two examples illustrate teasing concerning "boys love girls." The two boys WeiMing and HongBin, in the M year, tease each other about loving girls.

Example 5: Teasing: You love girls!
Children are in the line to have TM (Teacher of the M group) check their assignment and behavior checklist (including brushing teeth at night, etc.) Note that this practice was cancelled when the children were in the L year. The two boys, WeiMing and HongBin have the following conversation when they pass MeiYing's (girl) seat.

(The children use Taiwanese in this conversation, except "girl(s)," "boy(s)," "teacher" and children's names. TM speaks in Mandarin.)
10:21
WeiMing: Lee MeiYing. This is Lee MeiYing oh!
(WeiMing and HongBin look at Lee MeiYing's seat which is near the line)
HongBin: *MeiYing oh!* (note: calling someone by first name indicates

closeness.)
WeiMing: *Ouch! You love girls. [At] your, your desk, there are all girls.*
HongBin: *But at your desk, there are all girls too.*
WeiMing: *This is a girl. This is a boy. This is a girl. This is a boy.* (Counting the seats of his desk)
HongBin: *Ah, you are the same. [You] love Lai LiangYun*
WeiMing: *You love, you love Lee MeiYing.*
BenChi (boy): Female.
WeiMing: How can you say you are female?
HongBin: Right, you're female.
WeiMing: Teacher! Lo BenChi said he's female. Lo BenChi said he's female.
TM: No. BenChi is male.
WeiMing: He said he's female.
TM (to BenChi): BenChi, boy or girl?
WeiMing: He says girl. He says he's female.
(TM continues checking children's assignment and does not respond further.)

HongBin becomes the target of teasing when he refers to MeiYing by first name. He is then teased that he loves girls. The argument goes on to connect sitting with girls and loving girls. Interestingly, when each of them says the other person loves a girl, neither of the two denies the claim. The two boys, HongBin and WeiMing indirectly admit that each of them loves a girl. It is important to note that even though loving girls is under risk of being teased, the two boys do not deny the fact that each of them loves a girl. BenChi's participation in this conversation changes the focus to whether BenChi is a boy or girl. The target for teasing switches to BenChi. Even the teacher is asked by the children to make a judgment.

Example 6
9:46:35
Both M group and S group are at the Blue Line area. They had an instruction session earlier. TM asks children to squeeze into the yellow line, which is inside the blue line.
HongBin (boy) to WeiMing (boy): *You love* (two words in Taiwanese) *girls! You love* (two words in Taiwanese) *girls!*
(Possibly WeiMing lines up behind JuShien (girl) and they might have bumped into each other.)

Example 6 illustrates that a boy could become a target of teasing by just bumping

into a girl! Similar to Example 5, being physically close to females, such as sitting together, would be a source of teasing about loving girls.

Girls in this study reacted to the issue of gender in a slightly different way from the boys during non-official play. During my fieldwork, I did not observe girls teasing each other about loving boys. Rather, they teased boys. The following are two examples.

Example 7: Your sister talked to males (in the L year)
LiangYun (girl) and WeiMing (boy) sit next to each other. LiangYun and WeiMing have been talking about what she has learned about calculating and her speed arithmetic class. WeiMing's older sister, who is two years older, is in that class too. That class is not related to this preschool. Note: LiangYun and WeiMing constantly talk to each other and play chase-and-escape. At level M, WeiMing told me that LiangYun was one of his best friends in the classroom. He also on one occasion admitted that he loved LiangYun.
(Taiwanese is used in this conversation, except "division" and "multiplication."
LiangYun: Oh, I only can do division, multiplication.
WeiMing: Division, can you do that?
LiangYun: Multiplication, I say multiplication.
WeiMing: xxx
(The teacher is writing on the blackboard.)
LiangYun (G): Division? Even your sister can't do that! *Your older sister talked to males who were behind her!* (LiangYun is smiling. Her voice is extremely soft.)
(The two stop their conversation and look at the teacher, who is about to finish writing on the blackboard.)

In Example 7, LiangYun suddenly says in a teasing tone that WeiMing's sister talked to males. WeiMing does not respond because the two children are aware that the teacher is starting the instruction shortly. However, it is interesting that even one's sister talking to males could be a topic for teasing. Moreover, LiangYun is teasing a boy about this—in doing so, she herself is talking to a male!

In other occasions during non-official play time, the two children frequently engaged in a playful routine involving chasing, escaping and laughing. Also as in this example, the two children constantly talked to each other and discussed a wide range of topics at both year levels M and L.

Example 8: Dear Husband! (in the L year)

11:50:57
LingYu (girl) and YeeGee (boy) are eating lunch. The two sit next to each other.
LingYu: Dear Husband![pronounced "Lao Gong" =old + male]
YeeGee: Miss [=title for young women]!
LingYu: Dear Husband!
YeeGee: Old Ugly! (in Taiwanese)
LingYu: Dear Husband!
YeeGee: Old Ugly! (in Taiwanese)

In this example, the two children engage in a teasing sequence by using titles. The girl initiates the teasing by calling the boy "dear husband." The boy counters by "miss," which is often used for young women. The girl continues to tease the boy by calling him "dear husband." The boy cleverly uses the first character of dear husband and changes the second character into "ugly" to transform the word into "old ugly."

It may be important to note that LingYu often actively interacted with boys in a very open way. On one of the very few occasions that I observed children in the playground, she was the only girl climbing up to the top of a climbing net with a dozen or so boys. She also was very interested in issues of boyfriends and girlfriends. She told me one time that she had many boyfriends and girlfriends and she preferred boyfriends.

In the above four examples of teasing concerning gender relationship, boys were teased in different ways. Does this indicate that girls in this study were not teased about gender relationship at all? My observation suggests that girls were less likely to be teased in an open way about loving boys. On one occasion, LingYun, in the L year, was crying because someone said that she loved a boy that she did not love at all. The whole event was not playful but full of serious conflict among several children.

Male/Female Relationship Outside of Play

Daily Interaction Among Peers

We all are classmates: Regular interaction among boys and girls. Boys and girls in this study interacted frequently in their school life. Their seats were mixed and not segregated by gender. Children talked to their desk neighbors very often. At times they went over to other desks and talked to friends of both genders. When they worked on worksheets and art work, they very often discussed with desk neighbors to clarify questions, borrowed crayons, and discussed issues such as which way would make their drawing beautiful. Children did not seem concerned with the issue of gender segregation most of the time. Also because the identity of being classmates, every child was assumed to get along well with other children in the same classroom.

Cross-gender Friendships

Cross-gender friendships: Making the relationship subtle. Cross-gender friendships were common among the children I observed. Cross-gender friends talked to each other very often if they were at the same desk. If one's cross-gender friend was seated at another desk, it took extra effort to reach the friend. Children would stop by a friend's desk on their way to the bathroom or when turning in a worksheet that the route they took was not the most direct way to their destination.

Although in the L year, several pairs of friends had lasted for more than a year, these children tended to make their friendships subtle. For example, cross-gender friends did not play together during official play time. Children seemed to avoid making their cross-gender friendship salient in activities when they had public choices such as during the official play time. They also would not choose to sit together at the Blue Line Area when they had choices. Rather, they most often together engaged in non-official play and conversations.

He loves females: Peer pressure on cross-gender friendships. Cross-gender friendships were under pressure of being accused of being romantic relationships. This pressure was more salient when the children were in the L year than when they were in the M year. Among the children I observed, a few boys seemed particularly concerned about the issue of romantic relationships and discussed it quite extensively. Most of the examples were mainly from the boys. I only captured a few discussions from girls, which were not as extensive as the ones from the boys. A few girls told me instances about who had been paired up.

Example 9: Spreading rumors (in the L year)

At around 9:26, while the children are eating their morning light meal, MangJun (girl) wants to tell YeeGee (boy) something but YeeGee puts his palms on the side of ears and refuses to listen. MangJun then hits YeeGee one time. YeeGee hits MangJun back. GuanKang (boy) comes to defend MangJun and says, "She is my friend!" GuanKang and YeeGee make several exchanges of noises to each other as harassment. They stop when the teacher announces to the class to sit down.

After the children finish their meal, they move to the Blue Line Area, an all-purpose open space. They are waiting for rehearsal of the speech and drama that they will perform on their graduation day. YeeGee spreads rumors that GuanKang loves females. FungShi (boy), HongBin (boy), WeiMing (boy) also are spreading this information and laugh. ShiJun (boy) does not say a word but

observes the event.

In this example, YeeGee conveys the information to a group of boys that GuanKang loves girls. This action is considered as a bad action because it involves attacking others secretly. GuanKang is laughed at by several of the boys but he himself does not know about it. The pressure is also obvious in the examples of teasing (Example 5, 6 and 7). If a child could not take on the teasing and possible insults related to cross-gender friendship, it would be difficult to maintain such friendships.

Projections of the Future

In the future you will date girls: Children's talk about their male/female relationships. Children talked about their male/female relationships in their daily life. When the children were in the L year, they at times engaged in quite serious talk about this topic. Their discussion included not only the current situation but projections of the future.

Example 10
(continuation of Example 9)
In Example 9, ShiJun (boy) does not say a word but observes the event when the other children are spreading rumors that GuanKang loves females. Twenty minutes later, when some children are doing their rehearsal, YeeGee, ShiJun and LingYu (girl) have a conversation about "you love females" and marriage. LingJie (boy) and GuanKang later join the conversation. The children speak mostly Taiwanese during this conversation. (note: the children's voices are very soft. At the scene, I did not hear it when I was in the classroom.)

(The children use Taiwanese, except "girls" and children's names. T uses Mandarin.)
9:52:20
YeeGee (to ShiJun): *You love females. You love females. You talk to females.*
(ShiJun puts his right hand under his face. He does not reply. The silence is about 10 seconds.)
9:52:40 (YeeGee breaks the silence.)
YeeGee: *You love females!* xxx
9:52:44
ShiJun: *This, you in the future will date girls!*

YeeGee: *I don't want to get married* (married in).
(note: In Taiwanese, there are two words for getting married. Women marry out with someone. Men marry in with someone.)
ShiJun: *It will not work even if you do not want to get married* (married in).
Even you do not want to get married (married in), *you will have to.*
YeeGee: *I do not want to get married* (marry in)
LingYu: *Alternatively, how about you get married* (married in) *with another wife!*
YeeGee: Me, me xxx don't want to get married (marry in)!
LingYu: Alternatively, how about you not get married (married in)!
ShiJun: *Then there will not be women in your home.*
LingYu: *Then your stomach will be hungry.*
YeeGee: *If I xxx, I become big/grown up.*
ShiJun: *If you do not have money, you won't have rice either. How can you xxx?*
YeeGee: *I will make money and it will work!*
LingYu: *You have no way to have children!*
ShiJun: Right, if you do not have children xxx
YeeGee: Maybe my brother xxx
9:53:18
T yells: Wu LingJie !! xxx
(T asks LingJie to come to see her. It seems related to LingJie's homework or worksheet. It is unrelated to YeeGee, ShiJun and LingYu. But they stop their conversation.)
9:53:23
YeeGee: Pee on the bottom of pants.
(YeeGee says this without specific audience. Earlier in the day, He talks to WeiMing (boy) on this issue. WeiMing had an accident in the bathroom the other day.)
YeeGee (to LingJie): My brother has no "Yuan" at all. My brother has no "Yuan" at all. Do you have brothers? (note: "Yuan" means fate, chance and opportunities to meet people. In this case, it seems to refer to the fact that his cousin (also called brother) has no luck of meeting an ideal woman to get married.)
LingJie: *In the future you will get married* (married out) *with Chen LingYu. I know it !!*
(Note: He misuses marry out. He may not understand the difference between the two words "jia [=married out]" and "chiu [=married in]")
ShiJun: It won't be!

GuanKang: I want to married out with
(Note: He misuses marry out.)
(GuanKang does not finish his sentence because the teacher is yelling at the class about children's spots during the performance.)
9:53:55
T (yells): Last time ...(omitted. T talks to the children about the spot arrangement for the performance in their graduation ceremony. Children later start the practice for their performance.)

In this example, when YeeGee conveys the information to a group of boys that GuanKang loves girls, ShiJun does not join the laugher. In the later conversation, he tries to deliver his message that it is not a bad thing to talk to and love girls because boys will date girls and marry girls in the future. LingYu joins the discussion trying to suggest to YeeGee to find someone else to marry. She then tells the possible consequences of not getting married such as hunger and not having children. ShiJun also suggests two possible consequences of not getting married: there will be no women in the home and no rice to eat. YeeGee seems determined not to get married.

GuanKang and LingJie have not mastered the distinction between "marry in" and "marry out" and their association with gender. Other children use the words correctly but they do not point out the mistakes that GuanKang and LingJie make. It is a funny mistake from an adult perspective, but the children do not seem to find it funny, perhaps only a bit confusing.

When the topic is picked up again by YeeGee after the teacher's interruption he seems to have something in his mind related to his brother (possibly a cousin, because his brother is in elementary school and not old enough to get married.). He mentions that his brother has no "Yuan." "Yuan" is an often used word in Taiwan with abstract meanings. Surprisingly 6-year-old YeeGee uses this word. "Yuan" is a description about relationship by fate, predestined relationship or natural affinity among friends. For example, a Chinese proverb "[We] have Yuan and meet from a thousand miles away" indicates that because of Yuan people can meet even though the physical distance is very far and the chance to meet is small. As in this proverb, "Yuan" does not only refer to romantic relationships but relationship in general among people. If two persons meet but do not like each other, it can be described that the two do not have Yuan. It could also be a case in which the two persons like each other but the timing is wrong so that they do not have opportunities to cooperate in career or to get married. Yuan denotes some kind of opportunity. An often usage of the word "Shuei Yuan," which means going with Yuan or may be translated as "Let it be" is a philosophy implying taking things easy and going with what is occurring but not

forcefully pursuing artificial goals. In this example, YeeGee's understanding about "Yuan" seems related to marriage and his idea of not getting married is very likely the result of something that happened to his cousin.

On another occasion, when 6-year-old YeeGee and his desk neighbors YingChung and FungShi are working on workbooks, they talked about who they loved the most. Interestingly, this conversation occurred later on the day that YeeGee claimed that he would not get married.

Example 11: I don't want any [other] girls. I only want Lee MeiYing, period. 2:52:10

YeeGee, YingChung and FungShi are desk neighbors. They are working on their workbooks. Some children have gone to "operate" at 2:34. Children need to straighten up a few workbooks that they did not finish in the previous days before going to play. A few minutes before the following conversation, two children were distributing snacks that they brought from home to share with the whole class.

YeeGee: LingYu's [candy] is most tasty. Seaweed is not tasty. I don't like seaweed.
YingChung: I know who I like the most is ... Who do you like the most? (one second pause) LingYu!
YeeGee: Wrong!
YingChung: And MangJun (girl) loves BiChen (a child I don't know of) the most.
FungShi: Not correct!
YingChung: The person you love most is...
YeeGee: Shi MangJun!
YingChung: Shi GuanKang loves Shi ManJun the most. This way [should be right]!
YeeGee: He wants to marry two [persons]. He wants to marry Chen LingYu and Shi MangJun.
YingChung: I don't want any [other] girls. I only want xxx (unintelligible, sounds like a name of a girl not in this classroom). How could I marry that many [persons]?
YeeGee: I don't want any [other] girls. I only want Lee MeiYing, period.
FungShi: Then you don't want your mom?
(The two other boys look a bit puzzled. They do not respond to FungShi's question.)

(A few seconds later, YeeGee talks about his sister brought him to a nearby elementary school.)

In this example, the children seriously talk about who they like the most and sentences from YingChung and YeeGee even indicate that they plan to marry the girls they like the most. However, at the end of this discussion, FungShi expresses his confusion and concern about his mother yet other boys do not take the question and respond to it.

Discussion

In sum, children in this study displayed a complex understanding about male/female relationships in different kinds of play time and inside and outside of play. Fernie, Davies, Kantor, and McMurray (1993) demonstrate how preschool children struggle to construct their full social membership in classroom discourse, that is, how they often achieve simultaneously different identities as students, peers, and gendered persons in U.S. and Australian preschools. The children in the current study displayed a similar pattern in managing different identities. Inside of play, the children's way of handling the issue of gender demonstrated variety and at times contradictory tendencies. During official play time, some boys self-policed themselves from playing with girls, yet at other times participated in the girls' play group. Some children seemed comfortable with playing in mixed-gender groups and even enacting boyfriend and girlfriend roles in their play scenes. In contrast, during non-official play time, boys and girls were more integrated and gender boundaries were less obvious. Outside of play, the children's cross-gender interaction was frequent. The identity of being classmates or students, who ought to get along well, encouraged children to interact with their fellow classmates, regardless whether they were boys or girls.

Thorne (1993) described a particular kind of interaction as "borderwork," in which boys and girls participate in ways that emphasized their opposition, and gender boundaries were activated. Often seen examples of borderwork in Thorne's study on working-class U.S. kindergarten and elementary school children, included contests and chasing. In JingJing Preschool, on a few occasions during class time, the teacher would ask if any girls or boys knew the answer to a question as a way of posing a contest between boys and girls, yet most of the time the contest was among children in different desks, mixed as to gender. In contrast, the children themselves did not engage frequently in contests between boys and girls. The most obvious situation in which gender boundaries were activated by children themselves was some boys' self-policing, "Don't play with females!" during official play time. Still, the children

tended to protect their cross-gender friendships by making them subtle to prevent teasing from other children. As Thorne (1993) described, to prevent being teased, boys and girls tend to avoid one another in activities of "witnessed choice," when the situation of choosing a player of the other gender was public and witnessed by peers. The official play time in JingJing Preschool was the major situation in which witnessed choice existed, and cross-gender friendships were best kept underground to avoid being teased. There were children who had developed their own thinking, which was a counter force to the "mainstream" peer pressure on "loving females." They seriously considered the possibility of dating and getting married in the future. The children's play and daily conversations displayed that, between the ages 4 and 6, they have begun to explore aspects of male/female relationships, even romantic relationships and marriage.

Children's concern and interest in the issue of gender was significant in this study. As indicated in Corsaro (1997), gender is an important membership category in peer culture in the preschool. Children in this study had extensive discussions about males and females. Their official play displayed a tendency that some boys particularly preferred a special kind of blocks, and a big group of girls very often engaged in pretend play with respect to family and stores. Some boys participated in this girl-dominant play group and some smaller play groups were mixed gender. This composition of play groups in official play time seems related to two contradictory ingredients -- some boys' self-policing about "don't play with females," and the general classroom atmosphere encouraging children to interact with all fellow classmates.

Farris (1988) reported that Taiwanese preschool girls, age 5 to 6, tended to develop a dual communication style involving both a babyish style and an authoritarian/"mothering" style. However, girls in JingJing Preschool did not display a similar pattern. Children in JingJing Preschool adjusted their attitudes and tones of speaking in different situations. Yet, such adjustment seemed not to be gender specific.

Although some researchers have claimed that boys and girls have different focal concerns and different cultures (e.g., Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992; Gilligan, 1982), the current research does not point to this "two cultures" tendency. Concerns such as autonomy, self-reliance, caring, intimacy and emotional expression, which include both boys' and girls' focal concerns in the "two cultures" assumption, all seemed to be important to the children' peer culture in JingJing Preschool, irrespective of gender. Obviously, gender is important to children's peer culture, yet grounded observations are necessary to determine how children actually go about playing and discussing in their everyday lives in ways that are gendered (e.g., Corsaro, 1997; Goodwin, 1990;

Thorne, 1993).

With respect to the different preference of replica objects between boys and girls in pretend play (Haight & Miller, 1993), it was obvious for some but not all children under this study. The all-boy blocks group was constantly engaged in making airplanes and air craft for pretending to fly, fight and repair. Yet these boys at times participated in other play groups, pretending to be customers and guests of stores. The girl-dominant group mainly played with all available pretend objects, such as stuffed animals, small chips, and bottles for different purposes. One important feature of this girl-dominant play group was that they did not play roles of the other gender. That is, boys would not take female roles and vice versa. A girl would not play a role as father, and a boy would not play a role as aunt. However, their roles were not gender-stereotyped in terms of profession. For example, either girls or boys could be doctors, bread makers, and bosses.

Moreover, in both the pretend world and daily conversations, preschool children in the current study have started to explore male/female relationships and how to maintain cross-gender friendship under the pressure of, "He loves females!" Children pretended to be boyfriends and girlfriends to act out situations of teasing and opposing from the girl's family members. They also discussed extensively their current and future male/female relationships. All the evidence pointed to the importance of the issue of gender in the preschool children's life and how they constantly encountered and negotiated this issue in their peer group. Thus, the issue of gender is essential for the understanding of peer culture and socialization in the preschool.

The children's performances across different contexts demonstrated their complex understanding about male/female relationships. Inside of play, the children's way of handling the issue of gender showed variety and at times contradictory tendencies. During "official" playtime, which was granted by the teacher, some boys self-policed themselves from playing with girls, yet at other times participated in the girls' play group. Some children seemed comfortable with playing in mixed-gender groups and even enacting boyfriend and girlfriend roles in their play scenes. In contrast, during non-official playtime, which was not officially granted by the teacher but which the children appropriated, boys and girls were more integrated and gender boundaries were less obvious. Outside of play, the children's cross-gender interaction was frequent.

The children's interaction patterns among boys and girls can be linked to two cultural membership categories in the preschool: being a group member and a gendered person. The children's identity of being a group member, who ought to get along well, encouraged children to interact with their fellow classmates regardless of gender. The children's group orientation was reinforced in school activities in which

the individual group members could be honored or shamed by the group as a whole. Children of the same classroom shared a strong sense of cohesiveness. The other identity of being a gendered person was evoked during certain situations and it constrained children's cross-gender interaction. Gender boundaries were activated in contexts when witnessed choices existed. Some children avoided cross-gender activities and kept cross-gender friendships underground to avoid being teased. However, there were children who had developed their own thinking, which was a counter force to the "mainstream" peer pressure on "loving females." They not only frequently participated in cross-gender activities but also seriously considered the possibility of dating and getting married in the future.

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